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Dear Mr. Hammerschmidt:

Your communication of March 16 enclosed a letter from Mr. Jamsai asking what the U.S. Government has done in response to reports of chemical warfare in Laos.

For some years, the U.S. Government has been aware of reports that some form of chemical agents may have been used in Laos against dissident minority groups there and has sought to gather more information.

By 1978, the U.S. had enough information to bring the matter for the first time to the attention of the government of Laos, which denied the validity of the reports.

In 1979, the U.S. continued to gather information from refugee and other sources. In addition to regularly interviewing refugees, the U.S. dispatched from Washington two teams specifically to interview refugees and investigate the matter. The U.S. made demarches to the governments of Vietnam and the Soviet Union, requesting that they look into these reports, and if they were true, to put an end to the practice. Both governments categorically denied the validity of the reports.

Reports of incidents have continued from time to time, the latest attack reportedly occurring in May, 1980. In view of the continued reports, the U.S. has repeatedly expressed its deep con[illegible]n in such fora as the UN Human Rights Commission, and the [illegible]mittee on Disarmament.

We have shared our concerns over these reports, and the reports themselves, with other countries and with international bodies, such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross. We have asked them to be alert for information that would bear on these reports, and to use any influence they might have to oppose use of chemical weapons.

U.S. officials have testified before Congress on this issue twice, on December 12, 1979, and on April 24, 1980. These hearings generated considerable publicity and interest.

[illegible] U.S. has called for international investigations of reports of chemical warfare, in Laos and elsewhere. Former Secretary of State Muskie, in his opening address to the United Nations General Assembly Session September 23, 1980 stated:

The Honorable
John Paul Hammerschmidt,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR

REVIEWED BY T. Gleason DATE 8/31/82

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To support the effort of the newly expanded Committee on Disarmament to ... work toward a comprehensive ban on chemical weapons, and to continue to pursue our bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union on an effective prohibition against chemical weapons.

.....

Before I leave this subject, let me emphasize our deep concern over another arms control matter. If arms control is to be successful, agreements must be fully honored. Countries such as those named by previous reports that chemical weapons have been used in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea cannot be ignored by the international community. To do so would undermine both arms control and international law. The United States, therefore, welcomes the emphasis placed by the Committee on Disarmament at last year's session on the need for international efforts to determine the facts behind these reports. We believe that an impartial investigation into these reports would most appropriately be launched under the auspices of the United Nations.

The U.S. Government is not in a position to either confirm or [illegible] unequivocally persons of the use of chemical weapons in Laos or to share the [illegible] has at its disposal. However, the issues is sufficiently serious and the possession of sufficient circumstantial credibility to warrant a thorough, impartial international investigation.

[illegible] particular concern has been of real, large scale use, or modification of newly developed ones to evade, and the entire [illegible] has an interest in seeing that chemical warfare is not used.

On December 13, the United Nations General Assembly voted 78-27-36 for a resolution to establish an investigation. A commission has been named, and it has begun to gather information. The U.S. will support this investigation. We have supplied the UN with such evidence and

other reports that have a bearing on this issue. We will continue to seek information, and will keep Congress informed of significant developments.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Fairbanks
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

Enclosure:

Correspondence Returned.

cc: